
Commission News



An Update to the Commissioners of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission

Full Commission Meeting December 19, 2002

JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING SUBCOMMITTEE

As a follow-up to the staff retreat and the full commission retreat that took place on September 5, 2002, the Chairman has asked that the executive committee and the chairs of the various sub-committees work on defining the desired future for the Heritage Corridor and the Commission. This joint committee met for the first time on November 14th at Woonsocket Town Hall and will meet again over the next several months to look to the immediate needs of defining the Development Program for fiscal year 2003. It will also consider how we work, where we place our investments and address capacity issues related to the Commission and its partners as we approach the Commission sunset in 2006. It is the intent of this joint committee to have each Chairperson share information from their committee members and constituents and develop a program that is reflective upon the Commission Plan and the future goals of the Commission.

A series of focus group discussions will be convened in December with key partner organizations and constituents to discuss common agendas, analyze barriers and challenges, and identify critical issues and future opportunities. The 1 ½ hour forums will include a brief presentation by Corridor staff and a facilitated discussion led by Gayle Gifford, a private consultant who participated in the staff and Commission retreats held earlier this year. All Commissioners are invited to participate in the focus groups. Please see the calendar on page 3 for meeting locations and times, and please call Linda McWhorter to RSVP.

The outcome of the focus group discussions will be reviewed at the next Full Commission meeting. The next meeting of the Joint Strategic Planning Subcommittee is scheduled to take place on January 9th from 9:00am-12pm, immediately following the Executive Subcommittee meeting that will begin at 8:30am. The ultimate goal is to have the FY 2003 funding recommendations in place for the Annual Meeting on February 6th and for the Washington briefing with the Congressional

Delegation on February 19th. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Michael Creasey.

SPECIAL SITES

Kelly House Dedication



Governor Lincoln Almond, Jan Reitsma, Director, RI Department of Environmental Management, Bill Ankner, RI DOT and the Heritage Corridor were pleased to announce the opening of the newest interpretive facility in the Heritage Corridor - The Blackstone Canal and Transportation Museum at the Blackstone River State Park in Lincoln, Rhode Island on Thursday, November 14, 2002. David Chapman designed the attractive and informative exhibits which focus on the transportation history of the Blackstone River Valley. Many thanks are due to the staffs of RIDEM and the State Historic Preservation Office and others who have made this great exhibit come to fruition. The Heritage Corridor's "Volunteers in Parks" program shall be working with RIDEM on staffing the new museum. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Nancy Brittain.

Kelly House Landscape Plan

A Master Plan for the Blackstone River State Park in Lincoln, RI is underway, including the design for an historic landscape rehabilitation around the Kelly House. RIDEM is undertaking this project with funding from the Federal Transportation Enhancements Program. Landscape improvements within this historic setting will add the final polish to the Kelly House surroundings along with recent connection of two bikeway segments over the Blackstone River.

An overriding goal of the plan is to let historic artifacts, found in the landscape emerge and speak for themselves. With the presence of the Blackstone Canal and Towpath, archeological evidence of the early Ashton Mill, a tenement house and gasometer, the site's rich history can be revealed. A guided walking tour and interpretive signs will help fill in the story. Soon, the outside will complement the wonderful story inside the Kelly House museum: an evolution of the site seen through changes in technology and transportation. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Nancy Brittain.

BIKEWAY UPDATE



The Blackstone River Bikeway is steadily moving toward completion. In Rhode Island, the bikeway has seen another ribbon cutting. Governor Lincoln Almond along with officials from RI DOT and RIDEM, gathered at the historic Wilbur Kelly House in Lincoln, RI to dedicate a newly constructed bikeway bridge which now connects the citizens of Cumberland and Lincoln, RI. This new million dollar bikeway bridge is located on historic abutments where a road once crossed the Blackstone River. There are now seven continuous miles of bikeway to enjoy with additional miles currently under design.

In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Highway Department's (MHD) Bikeway Task Force continues to meet regularly to move the bikeway project forward. It is anticipated that, over the next few months, MHD will advertise for the design of the next segment of the bikeway which will include Millbury, Sutton and a portion of Grafton. This three mile segment will connect to the existing Route 122A bikeway parking facility in Millbury south to Grafton.

A three mile segment of the bikeway in Millville and Uxbridge has reached the 25% design stage and MHD will be conducting a public hearing on this segment in the spring of 2003.

Within the Rte. 146/I-90 project, the Rte. 20 construction contract has been awarded and construction has begun. This project includes 1.3 miles of off-road bikeway construction that also includes a bridge over the historic Blackstone Canal. This segment of bikeway is scheduled to be completed in 2003. Once completed, this section will connect to the existing segments, thereby creating a continuous 2.5 mile off-road bikeway. The remaining 2 miles of bikeway within the Rte. 146/I-90 project are on-road and are being constructed as part of the Brosnihan and Hurley Square contracts. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Diane Wendland.

BLACKSTONE VALLEY INSTITUTE

Urban Environmental Design Manual

With funding awarded by the Corridor Commission and US EPA, RIDEM has selected a consultant team lead by Dodson & Associates to produce an Environmental Design Manual for development in urbanized areas. With the help of an Advisory Committee the team will select locations from around the

Blackstone River Valley in Rhode Island to serve as case studies for the project. Case study sites that are selected will demonstrate a variety of urban development scenarios including brownfields, infill and redevelopment, and mill building re-use. The manual will provide guidelines that address a variety of environmental issues related to residential, commercial and industrial development in densely inhabited areas. If you are interested in participating on the Advisory Committee or know of a site that you would like to be considered for a case study, please contact Peter Hanlon at RIDEM (401) 222-3434 ext. 7040. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Juliet Walker.

Leadership Blackstone Valley

Recruitment has begun for the Winter 2003 session. The deadline for applications is Friday, January 6th. All Commissioners are encouraged to nominate applicants. Please contact Beckley Alley for an application packet, (508) 234-9090.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Blackstone Gateway Park Plan

The Greater Worcester Land Trust has received Corridor Commission funds to undertake a master plan for the

Blackstone Gateway Park along the Middle River in Worcester. A public meeting will be held to kick off the process on December 12. Contact Colin Novick at Greater Worcester Community Foundation for more information (508) 795-3838. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Halford Welch.

Blackstone Canal Studies

The conceptual design for the Blackstone Canal Feasibility Study in Worcester was presented and discussed at a public meeting on October 17th at the PNI Club in Worcester from 6:30 to 8:30pm. The study is exploring the possibility of daylighting and/or replicating the Blackstone Canal in Worcester. A final report including a preliminary implementation plan and recommendations will be completed by January. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Juliet Walker.

With partial funding awarded by the Commission, the consultant firm of VHB, Inc. is working on a survey and feasibility study for portions of the canal in Rhode Island with more detailed analysis of segments that seem best-suited for preservation and rehabilitation. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Nancy Brittain.

Blackstone Canal Feasibility Study Concept Plan

Illustrative Plan



THE RIVER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Open Space Grants Awarded to Blackstone River Watershed Council and Blackstone River Valley Communities

On November 18, 2002, Governor Lincoln Almond announced the latest round of successful recipients within RI for open space grants. The Blackstone River Watershed Council received \$300,000 towards acquiring fee title to 80 acres of land in Cumberland that is an important part of the watershed of Long Brook. This brook is a tributary of the Diamond Hill Reservoir (part of Pawtucket Water Supply) and is a habitat for the American Brook Lamprey, a fish found only in this Rhode Island location. This was the first time that a designated watershed council had received open space funds for land protection from this top rated grant.

Additionally, the towns of Cumberland and Lincoln also received funds for land protection. Cumberland received \$357,000 for acquiring fee title to 95 acres of forested land abutting the Sneece Pond Reservoir. Additionally, Lincoln received a \$400,000 grant to acquire fee title to 13 acres of land along the Moshassuck River, a property that abuts Lincoln Woods State Park.

RIDEM played a critical role in working with local communities to identify properties and develop strong proposals. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Halford Welch.

Rail Transfer Station in Millbury

A private rail transfer company, LB Railco Inc., has proposed a truck-to-rail transload station near the P&W Railroad along the Blackstone River in Millbury. The station would accept construction and debris materials, non-hazardous contaminated soil and contained municipal waste. The site is within 50' of the Blackstone River and directly adjacent to the Bikeway. Under the review authority granted under Section 9 of the Commission's enabling legislation (Public Law 99-647), staff of the Commission has requested that the Surface Transportation Board (which oversees interstate commerce) consult with the Commission to determine if the activities of the facility will have an adverse impact on the Heritage Corridor and to determine what environmental review is necessary. As a result of the Commission's inquiries, the STB has stayed LB Railco's exemption notice to lease and operate the P&W lines pending their request for further environmental information and review. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Nancy Brittain and Michael Creasey.

EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Threads Across the Atlantic: From Belper to Pawtucket

In October, several groups of visitors from Belper, Derbyshire, England visited Pawtucket and the Blackstone River Valley representing community, local scholars, artists, and leisure interests. One aspect of the visit was the culmination of the "Belper to Pawtucket" exhibit and education project that the Commission funded with Slater Mill Historic Site. The "twinning" between the cities of Belper and Pawtucket is based on Samuel Slater having learned the textile trade in Belper and then bringing his technical knowledge to organize the Mill in Pawtucket, that opened in 1790.

The opening of the "Threads Across the Atlantic: From Belper to Pawtucket" exhibit took place Friday, October 11th at the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center. Six Belper-area artists worked with Slater Mill's curator Karin Conopask to create an exhibit using artwork, historic and current photos, and text to examine the connections between the two locations. Favorable reviews of the exhibit continued through its closing on November 22nd. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Sue Andrews.

Blackstone Valley Education Network offers Curriculum Coordinators' Tour

On October 25, twenty-six curriculum coordinators and teachers from 13 communities participated in a half-day tour exploring the educational opportunities for students in the Valley. Coordinated by Susan Spencer, Director of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation, this group began the day at River Bend Farm by experiencing the historic landscape at that location as well as hearing from Education Network members including the Massachusetts Audubon Society and others. The tour then traveled to the Explore & Discover Museum and visited Artists Studios in Uxbridge's Bernat Mills. The tour wrapped up in Woonsocket with a visit to the Museum of Work and Culture and a riverboat tour aboard the Blackstone Valley Explorer. The participants were also asked to respond to a draft curriculum statement for the Education Network and their feedback will be incorporated into the final version. They also heartily agreed to bring word of their experience back to the teachers they work with in their various school districts. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Sue Andrews.

VIP Program

The 2002 year was an exciting and growing year for the VIP program of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. A major highlight of the year was the creation of the VIP informational newspaper insert (see attached copy). The insert allowed us to spread the word about volunteer opportunities to many folks who have stepped

CALENDAR OF COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

December 13 – Focus Group on Heritage Sites and Education
– River Bend Farm Visitor Center - 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM.

December 16 - Focus Group on Tourism– Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce – 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM.

December 16 – Focus Group on Riverways – River Bend Farm Visitor Center -3:00 PM to 4:30 PM.

December 17 – Focus Group on Economic Development – Amica Corporation - 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM.

December 17 – Focus Group on Watershed – River Bend Farm Visitor Center - 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM.

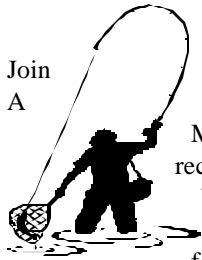
December 19 – Full Commission Meeting - Volunteer in Park Soup Supper, Leicester Town Hall – Supper at 6:00 PM/Full Commission Meeting at 7PM

January 9, 2003 – Joint Committee on Strategic Planning,
Priority Setting Workshop, 9AM-12PM, location TBD.

February 6, 2003 – Full Commission Meeting/Annual Dinner
– Chinese Christian Church - Pawtucket, Rhode Island with a reception prior to the event at the Visitor Center. Full Commission Meeting at 4PM/Reception at 5PM/Dinner at 6:45PM

forward and to others who wish to become involved with the VIP program. In order to tap into the existing volunteer spirit in the Valley, we began an “Umbrella” approach to volunteering. A unique uniform was developed for our volunteer corps that gives them a sense of connection to one another and readily identifies them as VIPs. The VIP program also provides a forum for training, support, and for developing new friendships that allows us to share our human resources throughout the Valley. This year an incredible 19, 853 hours were volunteered! With volunteers at the various sites sporting the same VIP uniforms, it has now become a welcome site to see the VIP’s in the community making a difference, “Imagine their Possibilities.” KEY STAFF CONTACT: Suzanne Buchanan.

Fly Fishing Club



Join us this winter to learn the art of fly-tying. A positive initial meeting at the First United Methodist Church in Woonsocket was recently held and a six-week Fly-tying Workshop was organized. Participants will work on getting their tackle boxes ready for Spring. The United FlyTyers of Rhode Island and the Blackstone Valley Flyfishers Club will conduct the clinic. Classes will be held in the meeting room of the Methodist church on Federal Street, next to the YMCA at 7PM on January 15, 22, 29 and February 5, 12, and 19. All materials and tools will be provided for a fee of \$5 per class. Classes are designed for all levels—novice, intermediate, and advanced tiers. For more information or reservations, call 401-762-0250. KEY STAFF CONTACT: Suzanne Buchanan.